

Teens and Sleep: Pointers for Parents

1. Educate yourself about adolescent development, including physical and behavioral changes you can expect (especially those that relate to sleep needs and patterns).
2. Look for signs of sleep deprivation (insufficient sleep) and sleepiness in your children. Keep in mind that the signs are not always obvious, especially in younger (pre-adolescent) children. Signs include
 - difficulty waking in the morning,
 - irritability late in the day,
 - falling asleep spontaneously during quiet times of the day,
 - sleeping for extra long periods on the weekends.

Other signs can mimic or exacerbate behaviors commonly associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
3. Enforce and maintain age-appropriate sleep schedules for all children.
4. Talk with your children about their individual sleep/wake schedules and levels of sleepiness. Assess how much time they spend in extracurricular and employment activities and how it affects their sleep patterns, and work with them to adjust their schedules to allow for enough sleep, if necessary.
5. Provide a home environment conducive to healthy sleep. Establish a quiet time in the evening when the lights are dimmed and loud music is not permitted. Do not allow use of the television, computer and telephone close to bedtime.
6. Encourage your children to complete a sleep diary for 7 to 14 consecutive (and typical) days. The diary can provide immediate information on poor sleep habits, and it can be used to measure the effectiveness of efforts to change. Be sure to share the sleep logs or diaries with any sleep experts or other health professional who later assesses your child's sleep or sleepiness. Why not keep your own sleep diary as well? (Sleep diaries are available from the National Sleep Foundation or from your local sleep center.)
7. If your child's sleep schedule during vacation is not synchronous with upcoming school or work demands, help him or her adjust their schedule for a smooth transition. This process can take from several days to several weeks, so plan ahead!
8. If conservative measures to shift your child's circadian rhythms are ineffective, or if your child practices good sleep habits and still has difficulty staying awake at times throughout the day:
 - Consult a sleep expert. Excessive daytime sleepiness can be a sign of narcolepsy, sleep apnea, periodic limb movement disorder and other serious but treatable sleep disorders.
 - Discuss with teachers and school officials ways to accommodate your child's needs, if needed. Excessive daytime sleepiness due to sleep disorders or other medical conditions are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA 97).
9. Be a good role model: make sleep a high priority for yourself and your family by practicing good sleep habits. Listen to your body: if you are often sleepy during the day, go to sleep earlier, take naps, or sleep longer when possible. Consult a sleep expert if needed. Above all, don't allow any family member to drive when sleep deprived or drowsy.

10. Actively seek positive changes in your community by increasing public awareness about sleep and the harmful effects of sleep deprivation and by supporting sleep-smart policies. Request that sleep education be included in school curricula at all levels and in drivers' education courses, and encourage your school district to provide optimal environments for learning, including adopting healthy and appropriate school start times for all students.
11. Young people are the largest at-risk group for fall-asleep car crashes. Be sure to discuss the dangers of drowsy driving with your teenager, especially around proms, after-school events, graduation or other times of increased activity.

Sleep Tips for Teens

1. Sleep is food for the brain: get enough of it, and get it when you need it. Even mild sleepiness can hurt your performance—from taking school exams to playing sports or video games. Lack of sleep can make you look tired and feel depressed, irritable and angry.
2. Keep consistency in mind: establish a regular bedtime and waketime schedule, and maintain this schedule during weekends and school (or work) vacations. Don't stray from your schedule frequently, and never do so for two or more consecutive nights. If you must go off schedule, avoid delaying your bedtime by more than one hour, awaken the next day within two hours of your regular schedule, and, if you are sleepy during the day, take an early afternoon nap.
3. Learn how much sleep you need to function at your best. You should awaken refreshed, not tired. Most adolescents need between 8.5 and 9.25 hours of sleep each night. Know when you need to get up in the morning, then calculate when you need to go to sleep to get at least 8.5 hours of sleep a night.
4. Get into bright light as soon as possible in the morning, but avoid it in the evening. The light helps to signal to the brain when it should wake up and when it should prepare to sleep.
5. Understand your circadian rhythms. Then you can try to maximize your schedule throughout the day according to your internal clock. For example, to compensate for your “slump (sleepy) times,” participate in stimulating activities or classes that are interactive, and try to avoid lecture classes and potentially unsafe activities, including driving.
6. After lunch (or after noon), stay away from caffeinated coffee and colas as well as nicotine, which are all stimulants. Also avoid alcohol, which disrupts sleep.
7. Relax before going to bed. Avoid heavy reading, studying and computer games within one hour of going to bed. Don't fall asleep with the television on—flickering light and stimulating content can inhibit restful sleep. If you work during the week, try to avoid working night hours. If you work until 9:30 pm, for example, you will need to plan time to unwind before going to sleep.

Become a sleep-smart trendsetter

- **Be a bed head, not a dead head.** Understand the dangers of insufficient sleep—and avoid them! Encourage your friends to do the same. Ask others how much sleep they've had lately before you let them drive you somewhere. Remember: friends don't let friends drive drowsy.
- **Brag about your bedtime.** Tell your friends how good you feel after getting more than 8 hours of sleep!
- **Do you study with a buddy?** If you're getting together after school, tell your pal you need to catch a nap first, or take a nap break if needed. (Taking a nap in the evening may make it harder for you to sleep at night, however.)
- **Steer clear of raves and say no to all-nighters.** Staying up late can cause chaos in your sleep patterns and your ability to be alert the next day ... and beyond. Remember, the best thing you can do to prepare for a test is to get plenty of sleep. All nighters or late-night study sessions might seem to give you more time to cram for your exam, but they are also likely to drain your brainpower.

